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Gregoire seeks Sound cleanup

By [Warren Cornwall](#)

Seattle Times staff reporter

Cleaning Puget Sound has proved an elusive goal for decades.

While fewer toxic chemicals and metals are spilling into the water from factories, more waste is washing in from roads and septic tanks. Chinook salmon and orcas are both under federal protection. Hood Canal has periodically turned into a dead zone for sea life.

Monday, Gov. Christine Gregoire announced her intention to stake her claim on the issue by proposing a \$42 million down payment on stemming pollution in the Sound.

And she appointed a panel of high-profile politicians and business, environmental and tribal leaders to come up with a plan for cleaning the Sound by 2020.

"We must take bold action if we are going to make it thriving," Gregoire said. "We must begin to step up our response to the scale of the problem."

More than \$32 million of the money the governor has proposed, which would mostly come from a tax increase on oil shipped into the state, would go toward cleaning up contaminated sediment and septic systems.

Much of the money already would have gone toward environmental cleanup, said Elliot Marks, Gregoire's adviser on natural-resource issues. But under the proposal, more of it would be spent on the Sound. And it would be in addition to roughly \$91 million per year in state and federal money budgeted for work in the Sound.

Environmentalists effusively praised Gregoire on Monday, saying they would adopt her proposal as one of their top goals for the state legislative session beginning in January.

"This is a great day," said Naki Stevens, program director for People for Puget Sound. "We're very, very excited."

But William Ruckelshaus, a former head of the U.S. Environmental

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STEVE RINGMAN / THE SEATTLE TIMES

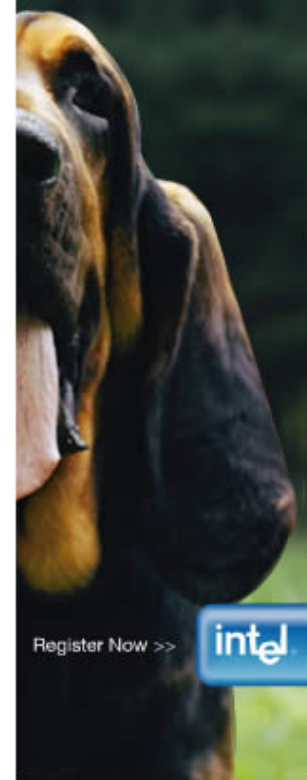
Gov. Christine Gregoire announces her plan Monday to spend \$42 million, in addition to about \$91 million per year budgeted in state and federal money, to restore and protect Puget Sound.

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Protection Agency and a member of Gregoire's new task force, noted that other parts of the country have declared similar initiatives to restore waters such as Chesapeake and San Francisco bays and the Great Lakes. None of them has yet succeeded.

"It will take a miracle," he said of cleaning the Sound. "But in this season of celebrating miracles, you have challenged us, governor, to create another one."

Perhaps the biggest challenge to the health of the Sound will be the region's population, which is expected to swell by 1.5 million people by 2020. That could mean more cars leaving toxic chemicals, and more land cleared for homes, which can mean dirtier water flowing to the Sound.

The plan, if approved by the Legislature, would earmark \$6.5 million for grants and loans to homeowners to upgrade septic systems; \$4 million to fix wastewater systems at state parks; and \$2.5 million to promote new methods of controlling stormwater runoff.

More than \$1 million would go to protections against oil spills, and nearly \$24 million would go to toxic cleanups, including ones already begun at Bellingham Bay and Tacoma's Commencement Bay.

Still, Gregoire didn't propose new land-use regulations or other measures aimed at preventing future pollution. Instead, she said the new task force would craft a plan next year to create public awareness and support for a broader initiative.

"I don't want to come down as though I knew it all," she said.

State Rep. Hans Dunshee, D-Snohomish, who chairs the House Capital Appropriations Committee, said he is inclined to support the types of measures Gregoire is promoting.

But Rep. Helen Sommers, D-Seattle, who chairs the House Appropriations Committee, said she wanted to take a closer look.

"We have been dedicating quite a bit of money to cleaning up the Puget Sound already," she said.

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